

REMARKS

In the subject Office Action, the examiner rejected Claims 1 and 6 as being anticipated by Fortune et al. under 35 USC 102(b), and rejected Claims 2-5 and 7-8 for obviousness under 35 USC 103(a) over Fortune et al. in view of Van Voorhies. Applicants request reconsideration of their application in view of this amendment, which amends Claims 1-8 and provides arguments in traverse of the subject rejections. The amendment of Claim 1 is intended to more clearly define Applicants' invention, and the amendment of Claims 2-8 is necessitated by the amendment of Claim 1.

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 1 under 35 USC 102(b) is in error. Fortune et al. disclose a "semi-rigid" interface panel (backer board 32) for use with a fluid-filled elastomeric seat bladder, but nothing in Fortune et al. is suggestive of an interface panel of non-uniform rigidity. Fortune et al. mention that the board may be smooth or contoured, but never mention that it may have non-uniform rigidity. Applicants can only surmise that the examiner is relying on the interface panel openings depicted in FIG. 2 of Fortune et al. – that is, viewing the openings as regions of reduced rigidity. Accordingly, Applicants have amended Claim 1 more clearly define their invention. Amended Claim 1 requires:

a fluid-filled elastomeric bladder disposed in said seat; and
an interface panel of non-uniform rigidity disposed adjacent to said elastomeric bladder for transferring occupant weight to said bladder, said interface panel having multiple rigid regions joined by intervening flexible regions, where said intervening flexible regions deflect in response to occupant weight to permit differential movement and angulation of said rigid regions to achieve regional transfer of said occupant weight to said bladder.

The amended claim language leaves no doubt that the only elements in Fortune et al. that can possibly correspond to the claimed interface panel are the backer board 32 or the felt pad 58. More importantly, the amended claim language recites that the interface panel has multiple rigid regions joined by intervening flexible regions, and that the flexible regions deflect in response to occupant weight to permit differential movement and angulation of the rigid regions to achieve regional transfer of the occupant weight to the fluid-filled bladder. By no stretch of the imagination is this shown or suggested by Fortune et al. Accordingly, Fortune et al. cannot possibly anticipate the subject matter of Claim 1 within the meaning of 35 USC 102(b). Claim 6 depends from Claim 1 and is patentable over Fortune et al. at least by virtue of such dependency. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the rejection of Claims 1 and 6 be withdrawn.

Applicants also respectfully submit that the rejection of Claims 2-5 and 7-8 under 35 USC 103(a) is in error. As noted above, Fortune et al. do not disclose or suggest the limitations of Claim 1, from which Claims 2-5 and 7-8 directly or indirectly depend. Since Van Voorhies likewise fails to disclose or suggest the claimed limitations, no combination of Fortune et al. and Van Voorhies can teach or suggest the claimed limitations. Van Voorhies discloses a bladder comprising bottom and top elastomeric sheets 17, 19, but fails to disclose any sort of interface panel. The examiner attempts to apply the elements of Van Voorhies' bladder to the claimed interface panel, but the bladder elements cannot be both a bladder and an interface panel disposed adjacent to the bladder as recited in amended Claim 1. Van Voorhies may well contain teachings relevant to bladder construction, but it contains no teachings relevant to interface panels disposed adjacent to a bladder for transferring occupant weight to the bladder. Accordingly, the combination of Fortune et al. and Van Voorhies is no more relevant to the claimed invention than Fortune et al. alone. Since Fortune et al. does not teach or suggest the claimed limitations as demonstrated above, no combination of Fortune et al. and Van Voorhies renders the subject matter of Claims 2-5 and 7-8 obvious within the

meaning of 35 USC 103(a). For this reason, Applicants request that the rejection of Claims 2-5 and 7-8 under 35 USC 103(a) be withdrawn.

Furthermore, rejected Claim 2 recites that the interface panel comprises a flexible base sheet and multiple rigid plates affixed to the base sheet. The only reference that discloses an interface panel is Fortune et al. as explained above, and Fortune et al. certainly do not disclose an interface panel comprising a flexible base sheet and multiple rigid plates affixed to the base sheet. Rejected Claims 3-5 depend from Claim 2 and set forth additional limitations neither shown nor suggested by any combination of Fortune et al. and Van Voorhies. Claim 3 recites that the base sheet of Claim 2 is a fabric material; Claim 4 recites that the multiple rigid plates exhibit different degrees of rigidity; and Claim 5 recites that the multiple rigid plates have different thicknesses. Rejected Claim 6 depends from Claim 1, and recites that the interface panel comprises a unitary sheet of non-uniform thickness. Rejected Claims 7-8 depend from Claim 1 and set forth additional limitations neither shown nor suggested by any combination of Fortune et al. and Van Voorhies. Claim 7 recites that the interface panel comprises multiple rigid plates affixed to a surface of said seat that engages said fluid-filled bladder; and Claim 8 recites that the multiple rigid plates are affixed to a foam cushion of the seat by insert molding. None of these limitations are taught by the cited art, and Applicants respectfully request that the rejection under 35 USC 103(a) be withdrawn for these additional reasons.

In summary, Claims 1-8 are considered to be in condition for allowance, and such allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Navarre". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mark" and last name "Navarre" clearly distinguishable.

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